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U.S. Aides Also Assert Noriega Helps Leftist Rebels in Colombia

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 11 — The army commander of Panama, a country vital to United States interests in Latin America, is extensively involved in illicit money laundering and drug activities and has provided a Latin American guerrilla group with arms, according to evidence collected by American intelligence agencies.

Senior State Department, White House, Pentagon and intelligence officials said the evidence also showed that the commander, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, who is in effect the leader of the country, had been tied to the killing of a political opponent. They also said that for the last 15 years, he had been providing intelligence information simultaneously to Cuba and the United States.

In addition, they said, General Noriega is a secret investor in Panamanian export companies that sell restricted American technology to Cuba and Eastern European countries.

Espionage Investigation in 70's

In the mid-1970's, according to former officials of the National Security Agency, General Noriega was implicated in a secret espionage investigation involving the transfer of highly sensitive agency materials to Havana. These officials said General Noriega purchased the N.S.A. documents from a United States Army sergeant on duty in Panama.

A White House official, discussing General Noriega's role in what he depicted as the "Panamanian connection," said curtailing the general's activities would play an enormous role in stopping the international trafficking of drugs by organized crime.

The head of the Panamanian military, called the Panama Defense Force, is widely viewed as the politically dominant force in the country.

General Noriega is on a visit to the United States this week and presented a Panamanian medal of honor today at

ingly important for the United States and its monitoring of insurgencies in Central America.

General's Activities: 'Legal and Illegal'

A recent classified report by the Defense Intelligence Agency concludes that General Noriega, operating through a small band of top associates in the military, maintains tight control of drug and money-laundering activities by his associates in the Panama Defense Force, according to one American official. The study said the general was "deeply involved in legal and illegal business."

"Nothing moves in Panama without the instructions, order and consent of



Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega of Panama at a reception yesterday at Fort McNair near Washington.

a private ceremony at the Inter-American Defense Board. Requests to interview the general in Washington received no response.

In Panama last weekend, General Noriega could not be interviewed to discuss the Americans' assertions despite three days of telephone calls to the army press office and attempts to reach him through other senior army officers.

Spokesman Denies Assertions

The general, said Capt. Eduardo E. Lim Yueng, the second in command of the Panama Defense Force press office, was too busy with other important business. Two days of telephone calls, including several written messages left with secretaries, brought no reply from the presidential press office.

Captain Lim Yueng, however, denied the assertions as a spokesman for the "institution of the armed forces and for General Noriega." He said General

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Dr. Hugo Spadafora, a leading critic of the Panamanian Army, who was killed last September.

scribed his involvement in the killing as "a critical misjudgment" on his part. The D.I.A. is also known to have intelligence demonstrating that General Noriega ordered the killing, according to an official with first-hand information.

Dr. Spadafora's decapitated body was found stuffed in a United States mailbag in Costa Rica just across the Panamanian-Costa Rican border. The killing occurred a few weeks before General Noriega ousted the civilian President, Nicolás Ardito Barletta, who was about to name an investigating commission.

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